

Melva's Corner

GOING THE DISTANCE

July 31, 2006

(Philippians 1:6)

Central Truth: The Holy Spirit empowers us to go the distance.

My life has had its share of curves and valleys. I haven't spent much time getting from one place to the other in a straight line. My path is much too winding. There are few straight lines and many roadblocks, detours, potholes, side streets and unforeseen difficulties. But as I look at the journey traveled so far, I can see the steady progress of God's hand shaping me to be more than I was when I began my journey. Granted, it has been a series of starts and stops. Many of the best days I took two steps forward and one step backwards. I easily remember the mistakes and wrong turns I've made that needed course correction periodically. Yet God's Spirit has graciously kept working to make more of me.

Transformation hasn't been immediate or clean. But it's there, irrefutable. But it's only when I look at the long haul that I realize God's handiwork in His flawed servant. Over the short haul, I see the difficulties, the pains, the failures, the insensitive moments, and the times I've disappointed more than delighted those I love. It is much easier for me to see the ground I've got to cover rather than the progress God has made despite my blunders.

I believe that if you will pause a moment and look at your life, you may find you've traveled a similar journey. In a world of instant everything, character and maturity are gained by God's Spirit and grace over time and even over our stupidities, failures, mistakes, and sins. We don't like the detours or the potholes, but those are precisely the difficulties that God uses to craft us into something more. Satan would like to make us think no progress has been made, that our failures are circular and inescapable. He wants us to give up in despair with maturity always beyond our grasp. But incredibly, the God who "knit us together" in our mother's womb (**Psalm 139:13-16**) is

the same God who is at work in every situation to bring us to an eternal good (**Romans 8:28-29**). What he has begun in us, he is determined to finish (**Philippians 1:6**) until we share in the glory of his perfect Son (**Romans 8:18; Philippians 3:20-21**).

Life can be many things, but quite often it can be down right hard! We describe those times as “an uphill climb.” We have to exert so much energy just to stay put, we forget about making progress. Before long, we become so discouraged with how far we have to go, that we settle in and try to just stay put by walking the place. We can’t begin to think about making the necessary effort to continue our advance on the upward call of God.

What we so often fail to realize is that staying put requires a lot more effort over the long haul than advancing forward. The Christian life is all about movement, either toward to God (**Philippians 3:13-14 RSV**) or slipping away from the life he wants for us (**Hebrews 2:1 NLT**). The principle of spiritual inertia is even more dramatic than the physical one. It takes more effort to hold our position without sliding back than it does to continue our growth in the Lord. God designed us to continue our growth in the Lord. Going forward, moving more to be like Christ, is the “natural” spiritual process God designed for us as the Holy Spirit works to transform us to be evermore like Jesus (**II Corinthians 3:18**). **When our growth stagnates — when we become complacent, when we are willing to settle for where we are — we inhibit the work of the Holy Spirit and begin the slow and futile fight of just trying to stay put in our walk in the Lord. The gravity of Satan and sin suddenly has a much stronger pull on our lives. Rather than living in the momentum of grace and the upward call of God, we find ourselves struggling harder to stay where we are than we ever did moving in the direction of Christ and His character.**

God never called us to walk in place in our spiritual lives. Instead, He told us to set our eyes on Jesus and keep on with the transformation process. Grace ensures that we will find it less difficult to travel forward as the Spirit empowers us to cover the distance. Let’s never settle for simply walking in place and staying put. **Complacency is too hard. Staying put is too dangerous. It’s not what we were made to do!** We were made to stay on the climb and experience the transformation of the Spirit. We were designed to go from Glory to Glory. So put

your life in gear, call on God to release the power of the Spirit, and set your sights on Jesus! There may be a lurch or two along the way, but the way is sure and the destination is certain!

Satan would love to defeat us through discouragement. He would love to have us stay off the road and quit our life as a traveler. The allure of no more difficult travel, of no detours and potholes, is tempting. But the biggest wrong turn we could make on our journey would be to quit making turns altogether and settle down where we find ourselves. While we may not be where we want to eventually be, that is what our journey is for. Ours is a journey of detours and potholes, but it is also a journey to Jesus.

Scriptural References:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.” (Hebrews 12:1-2 NLT)